

Kevin Minor: 0:04

Hello and welcome to the NASPO Pulse podcast, your go-to source for all things state procurement. I'm your host, Kevin Miner, and I am thrilled, as always, to be here Continuing our mini-series on the internship program at NASPO. We're talking to the membership. This is the other side of the mini-series where we talked to interns. Now we're talking to the members, those who manage the interns not necessarily the same interns that we talked to in the other podcast, but I think you get the idea. It's a great way to get perspective.

Kevin Minor: 0:40

Today, Shaquatia and I are talking with David O'Neill, Chief Procurement Officer for the great state of North Carolina, and Jody Clevin, who is the Deputy State Purchasing Officer, as well as the Chief Learning Officer in North Carolina. We discuss what North Carolina is doing to attract talent to their state, how they keep their interns engaged and the tools that the state equips the interns with to succeed. So make sure, if you haven't already, subscribe to the NASPO Pulse podcast wherever you get your podcast and never miss a beat. But, more importantly, sit back, relax and let's take the pulse. David and Jody, thank you so much for joining us today. How are you Doing great?

Jody Klevin: 1:26

Just fine, thank you.

Kevin Minor: 1:28

We're so glad to have you on with us today. Before we get started, can we just get a little bit of background introduce who you are and why exactly we should be listening to you today.

David O'Neil: 1:41

Well, Kevin, thank you so much for having us. My name is David O'Neill. I am the State Chief Procurement Officer within the Division of Purchasing Contract in the State of North Carolina's Department of Administration. I've been serving in this role for approximately two and a half years and thoroughly enjoy public procurement and what it has to offer our citizens of our great state.

Jody Klevin: 2:04

Yes, hello, thank you for having us. I am Jody Clevin, the Deputy State Purchasing Officer working with David at the North Carolina Department of Administration, and I have been in the role of Deputy State Purchasing Officer and Chief Learning Officer for two and a half years and my background is training in professional development, so I come at this role through procurement education. So that is my passion and my interest in this role.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 2:37

Okay, thank you so much, jody and David, for joining us here today. Would you be able to tell us, david, how did you and your office decide to participate in the internship program?

David O'Neil: 2:48

Absolutely. As you guys are well aware, one of the top 10 priorities that NASPO discovers when they survey all of the state chief procurement officers yearly is basically talent management and succession planning. And so a few years back, we started thinking how can we best build the pipeline of public procurement professionals and get the talent at a very early time as they're coming as these students are either in school or coming right out of school and get them into public procurement and I'll let Jodi follow up with that.

Jody Klevin: 3:32

Sure, david. And just to segue on that, knowing the research around the demographics related to you know what we call the shrinking workforce knowing that we've got lots of retirements on the horizon and that sort of thing, we wanted to, as David said, increase our efforts to fill the pipeline, if you will. We know that there's so much talent out

there. Individuals coming out of collegiate programs have new ideas. They've been immersed, with their professors, in recent literature and research and we really wanted to tap into that. Our internship program and a proposal that we developed for it several years ago talked about the goal of proactively ensuring the development and maintenance of the workforce capable of delivering quality services to our state's citizens. So that really is our mission and why we want to be intentional about filling this pipeline. And then personally, for me, being in procurement training as a training professional, my passion is coaching and mentoring, especially in terms of pre-service workers. So for me it was a natural fit.

Kevin Minor: 4:54

Excellent, and you mentioned sort of the shrinking workforce but also the amount of talent that you know is out there. What is North Carolina doing to attract the younger workforce and some of that talent to the public service side?

David O'Neil: 5:08

So what we're trying to do to attract that talent is partner with organizations such as NASPO, with the intern grant program that you guys do provide.

David O'Neil: 5:20

We've been fortunate that we've been awarded a grant two years this past year and then two years prior to that and we were able to utilize that to attract talent not only in the state of North Carolina but throughout the United States to come into our intern program.

David O'Neil: 5:39

So we've done that, are currently working with our academic partner in the state of North Carolina, which happens to be the North Carolina State University, go Wolfpack, and so we're working with them to sponsor events for first-year MBA students to attend mix and mingle events that they host on their campus in order to get public procurement at the forefront of those students' minds, because a lot of times in those academic settings, those students in particular are looking for those very high leveraged supply chain positions at organizations like Google and Apple and Amazon.

David O'Neil: 6:27

However, what we do in public procurement is vital to the success of not only our state but our country, and so when we're able to get in front of them at a very early time in their career, when they're trying to make their career decisions, to discuss with them the absolute benefits of public service and working in public procurement. It's a really good time and we found very good success in doing that. We're also partnering in the state of North Carolina with our local community colleges. We're in the very infant stages of developing an associate certification program that they'll be able to obtain during their time and tenure at a community college. So they'll have some of that public procurement knowledge, some of that common language necessary to get into public procurement and to be successful at a very early stage of their career early stage of their career.

Jody Klevin: 7:21

Kevin, I'll also add that we attend career fairs and we usually bring, when we are able, one of our current interns with us to those career fairs and we talk about with the students that you know interact with us at the career fairs, the opportunities for collaboration and networking and all those things that go along with public service and that we can offer our interns and then our full-time employees. So we really make an effort to get out there and be present at career fairs that are happening local.

Kevin Minor: 7:57

Sounds like a very aggressive strategy. I say aggressive it's in a positive way, but it sounds like a very aggressive strategy. You guys really stay on top of that.

David O'Neil: 8:05

We do our best.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 8:07

Speaking of aggressive strategies, I would just to segue into this, just ask the question as far as being and participating within the program, what would you say as far as you all wanted to see your intern accomplished within those first 30?

David O'Neil: 8:28

days. Well, thank you for that follow up question. Our internship program is a little bit more unique than your typical intern program. Most people, when you say intern, you think about that summer break, from like May to August, you know, and you go work for 90 days somewhere. We have been fortunate in the state of North Carolina to be able to expand our intern program and it's not just a three-month program, ours is an 11-month program that they're able to come in and sit with us during that normal typical, you know, may to August intern, but then they come work with us as well as their time and schedule allows during their school year for the next eight months after that.

David O'Neil: 9:19

So when you say that our first 30 days is kind of aggressive, intense, rigorous, because what we're trying to do is to acclimate these students into what public procurement looks like and so we have a very aggressive, you know what we're going to do. In week one, you know we're going to show you all the resources we have at the state of North Carolina. You know week two we're going to the resources we have at the state of North Carolina. You know week two we're going to match you up with your mentor Sometimes that's a public procurement professional that works with us. Sometimes it's one of our deputy state procurement officers. You know, it's just depending on time and schedule and what we'll allow and who can best suit them.

David O'Neil: 9:59

We match them up and we give them like a little bit of what we do, training wise, from a template and then start going over the public procurement documents right, the IFBs invitation for bids, the RFPs request for proposals, the RFQs request for quotes, things like that and then, after they get acclimated to that, in like week two and three, we start teaching them what we do and what good justifications look like and what good justifications look like and what an IFB looks like and what they're looking for when they need to evaluate all of those things.

David O'Neil: 10:31

So by the end of the first 30 to 45 days they have really been immersed into what public procurement is, and then that sets them up for success. As we move into the weeks and months after that, they are actually working on either capstone projects, whether that's to do a complete solicitation from beginning to end on one of our statewide term contracts, or whether that's helping to develop a policy, such as a debriefing policy for the state of North Carolina, of North Carolina, and so that's what's unique about ours 11 months first, 30 days. We're going to get you immersed, get you to understand what we do and why we do it, and then we pair them up with a mentor and coach for the next eight months after that to really help guide them and show them what we do as public procurement professionals.

Jody Klevin: 11:26

Right, I think David covered it as far as that well-rounded approach. You know we give them a schedule and they know you know how they're going to rotate in and out of different topics and really how they're going to interact with different mentors as well, can get experience working with different. You know different personalities and different types of professionals in our office, so it's a really well-rounded approach that we see that has been working very well.

Kevin Minor: 11:58

Yeah, that was kind of what I was going to ask as a follow-up. You know, when you talk internships you think like David was saying, oh for a summer. Right, just a couple months, quick in and out, make some copies. Sometimes it's almost like there's a negative connotation with an internship, but that is absolutely not the case. What you guys are doing that 11 whole months. I was just wondering how I don't really want to use the term burnout, but I'm wondering if that is a factor in what you guys see, or does the student stay engaged pretty much the whole time?

Jody Klevin: 12:41

I can start with answering that, and David may add Kevin, so the way we have that rotating schedule for them, the interns they you know they're looking forward to the next topic on their schedule, if you will, so it keeps them engaged.

Jody Klevin: 12:56

And then we also have and we'll get into this a little bit later I think we also have monthly check-ins with them and so they're able to share their project status report like David mentioned, the capstone project as they go.

Jody Klevin: 13:11

So each month they have a plan for sharing their work to date. So it really keeps them engaged and eliminates some of that burnout, if you will, because, a, they're looking forward to new tasks added to their load and then also they're working on that central capstone project the whole time added to their load, and then also they're working on that central capstone project the whole time and they're prepared for monthly to share that with our leadership team and their mentors. And so it really keeps them engaged and it helps them come together as a group of interns, because we often have two or three interns working on similar projects so they get to bounce it off each other every month. Hey, this is what my project has looked like in the past since we spoke last and hey, it's similar to what you're doing over there. And then we get that whole collaboration thing going with the interns and then they start working together. So I think those are some ways that we prevent that isolation and that burnout, if you will.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 14:09

David, did you have anything to add on that question?

David O'Neil: 14:13

As all things, public procurement, right. We're always in this continuous learning process and so you know, you guys asking us these questions in, basically, year Jody, is this year three or year four of our program? Right, we absolutely didn't have it all together in year one, right? And so you know lessons learned from year one, you know debriefing and figure out what can we do better. You know, at the end of year two, hey, what can we do better?

David O'Neil: 14:44

I believe this year's group of interns that we have, along with how we have enhanced our program, has really seen just an elevated level of work, an elevated level sense of camaraderie, elevated level of initiative. And, hey, what's next? What are we able to do? And I think that's just, you know, lessons learned. You know we tried some things out when we first started. You got to remember when we did our first intern program, the plan was come into the office five days a week and then March of what 2020 happened and oh, look, we can't hang out with anybody at all. And so we went from a plan to come into the building to a fully remote, virtual and, as everybody, is aware learning how to navigate that March of 2020, as compared to August of 2023,.

David O'Neil: 15:49

We all know how to do a whole lot of things a whole lot better from a technology standpoint, and so I think we had to learn and grow, and now we've got a pretty good, cliché, well-oiled machine going on what the intern looks like, on how we're going to rotate them, through the schedule, through the mentors and the coaches, and Jody and her team down at Procurement Education have done a phenomenal job of building this program to where we have

outstanding candidates that are willing, ready, willing and able to come, you know, hang out with us for 11 months.

Kevin Minor: 16:27

Absolutely, and that's actually a great segue into our next question. And you talked about the technology, excuse me, and you talked about the technology. What are some of the tools that you gave the interns to help them succeed?

Jody Klevin: 16:43

So, Kevin, I'll address that. We um, we've already talked about just that professional learning community that we like to set up with them. So we set that up from the very beginning by having, on day one, a pretty significant welcome meeting, if you will. We carve out a huge block of time for that. We have the whole leadership team present. We have the interns present, face to face with us. You know, we make it a nice event. We get the donuts and the coffee and then we just kind of give them the overview of our office and public procurement and all the different sections that we have in our office and how they interact. Then we talk about the schedule and show them how they'll rotate through those various sections and work with a wide number of professionals in those sections and being guided. And then we talk about how, you know, we want to learn as much from you as you're learning from us. We know you're out there in, you know the collegiate world and that you're learning from your professors and you've got really great relevant research articles. Please share them with us, that kind of thing. So we set that stage of the culture and climate of collegiality with them and it's a really neat event.

Jody Klevin: 17:59

At that event we have one of our tech, our system support people answering all the tech issues for them.

Jody Klevin: 18:06

So we have made it our mission to have them set up immediately with all the tools that anybody else on our team has any full-time employee on our team has.

Jody Klevin: 18:16

So we have their laptops ready to go, we've got their logins ready to go.

Jody Klevin: 18:20

We issue them a state email on day one and then that tech person has a segment in that first welcome meeting just to go over all the tech needs and get them online and up and running. And we're very proud of the fact that they have got state emails by the morning of day one and we're already interacting with them that way. So we give them the technology tools that we need, we give them the space for collaboration and additionally then we offer them, as tools, I would say, opportunities for training. We share with them our whole procurement education catalog and we say, hey, as interns for 11 months, take advantage of our in-house training. And we've got one current intern, Kevin, that is already saying, hey, I'm going to join one of your certification programs. He's starting this week to register and he is taking advantage of those tools that we offer for training. So we really try to make a huge effort and to give them the tools that they need to do all the tasks that we're going to have them do in their 11-month program.

Kevin Minor: 19:28

Wow, that's excellent. Yeah, I'll tell you from personal experience. I had an internship at City Hall under the community development planner in Kentucky and when I got that state email, oh man, I thought I was something else. Let me tell you, I was so proud of that. I'm emailing all my friends and my parents from my state email and it was. I mean. That alone was just really cool. So that's excellent. David, did you have anything to add to that?

David O'Neil: 19:57

I was like Jody pretty much, you know, hit the nail on the head, just like she always does.

David O'Neil: 20:01

And it is just amazing. It's good to see, I will add, you know, this year's intern group. We were fortunate that we were able to do all of that stuff face-to-face. But throughout the course of our program we could actually do exactly the same thing virtually. So if we happened to have an intern who was able to join us from, say, Oregon, we would have all of that stuff set up and shipped out to them at their location if they ended up being a fully remote participant in our program.

Jody Klevin: 20:34

Kevin, on something that you mentioned about how that that feel good feeling that those interns get to be a real part of the team I can tell you that they look at those badges that we issue them on the first day and they've got their lanyards around their neck and they are just absolutely feeling part of the team, where you know they've got their lanyards around their neck and they are just absolutely feeling part of the team, where you know they've got their badge from day one, they've got their state parking and so you know we really make an effort to have all that ready for them on day one. And I agree with you that it is a feel good feeling for those interns that they feel like I am part of the team, I am on staff here and you know we do lots of efforts to welcome them and introduce them to everybody on the team. So it is. It is absolutely that that I think they're writing home about that, saying hey, I am a part of this team.

Kevin Minor: 21:24

Check me out, check me out, mom yeah.

Jody Klevin: 21:25

Look at my badge.

Kevin Minor: 21:27

Yeah, that's great and as all of you mentioned.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 21:29

That's a big, big, big thing, especially myself being the one being able to talk to some of these students. They want to feel like a team and to have state members treat them as a teammate but also welcome them in, and everyone around them is like cheering them on and wanting them to win. That's the best feeling in the world. So I commend the both of you for that and having an excellent program thus far, and I just know it's just going to go even greater and better as time goes along. I'm already calling you all the veterans, so no competition here.

David O'Neil: 22:10

We still got a long ways to go and a lot to learn, but you know we're we're trying right, we're trying to get it there and put the best program forward we can.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 22:20

Yes, and with that being said, I should already know the answer to this. However, I'm just going to really try to attract that talent early and get them engaged in public procurement with our program.

David O'Neil: 22:58

And I still say it's really an infancy and we're still developing it. But we've got really two absolute success stories. Two of our first-year interns are now full-time employees within the Division of Purchase and Contract, and so one of them is a State Procurement Specialist 1. He served one year as an intern and then we were able to bring him on full-time onto our strategic sourcing team and he is doing amazing work.

David O'Neil: 23:32

Our second success story is really kind of unique. We got her as a junior in college. At her university she spent two

full 11-month cycles with us, so she was able to really garner two full years of state service while she was a student at her university and we were able to hire her on. She was working in our contract management section. Hire her on, she was working in our contract management section and then she actually was just promoted about a month ago to become a state procurement specialist too, on one of our strategic sourcing teams. And so those are two success stories that we've had.

David O'Neil: 24:17

One of our other interns is working in a public-facing role in another state and then, as Jody mentioned, we've got one intern currently who's looking to get his certification. He has also just graduated and we have a couple of open positions currently and he's going to I've been told you know, try and put his name in the hat for that one along with a former intern whose program just ended at the end of July. He's striving for that role as well. So just having people want to apply not necessarily just to our division but into the public procurement profession as alumni of our internship gives me chills, because that's really what we're trying to do Build that pipeline, get that talent coming, get them interested in public service and then get them into state agencies, universities, community colleges or local governments to help with the need of talent planning, succession planning, recruitment.

Jody Klevin: 25:22

And I would add to that that we started that second intern outright that David was mentioning. That was with us two years in that we just brought her to the most current reach conference in Cleveland. So we really wanted to give her that opportunity right away and she thoroughly enjoyed that. So we got her aware of the resources that NASPO provides through attending that conference with us. So it was really exciting to bring her along from the get-go and she said I'm so thrilled that I got this from the beginning so I know what all these resources are that NASPO offers to support me as a procurement professional. So she had a fantastic time in Cleveland with y'all.

Kevin Minor: 26:11

Great, excellent, we were happy to have her and you know it's, it's. The proof is in the pudding right. You can, you can declare success all day, but you have tangible evidence. You have examples of interns who have successfully not only gotten a job right but have found a place in the state to contribute, and that speaks for itself and I think that that's great.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 26:42

Definitely a place that you can call home, with North Carolina here. So I commend, I commend the both of you. So thank you.

Kevin Minor: 26:51

So, before we go today, before we wrap up, something that we like to ask all of our guests and David, we'll start with you Do you have any advice for our listeners?

David O'Neil: 26:58

This can be professional or personal advice for for the listeners Come on in the water's warm, right, we'd love like I can get on my soapbox. And somebody said, hey, do you have anything else to add? And you guys must not know me. And you told me you only had a few minutes, like I could go on and on and on.

David O'Neil: 27:19

But you know the feeling that I get as a public servant, that I'm able to see tangible results of the work we do in public procurement, whether that's locally, in the small little town I live in, right, or if that's, you know, more global, from what public procurement professionals do, like we touch a whole lot and it's just exciting. We get to be, you know, stewards of public trust and public funds. Sometimes that's scary, but I tell you what you know, being a taxpaying citizen myself it is imperative that we get good people and good talent and we thrive and enjoy what we do. And when you see a public servant and somebody who gets passionate about what they do, I can talk about

this forever and would love to, but we only got like 37 seconds. We only got like 37 seconds, you know. I just I'm excited and I love going to the, our academic partners and having to having to talk around public procurement and what we are able to offer and what we're able to do and the difference that we can make In your cities, towns, states and country.

Kevin Minor: 28:41

And Jody what? What's your advice for the listenership?

Jody Klevin: 28:43

Yeah, so I would. I would just say my favorite John Maxwell quote, and that is they don't want, let me get it right. They don't care what you know until they know that you care. In other words, as mentors, we think, oh, it's our job to impart the knowledge to these people. But in the words of you know, John Maxwell, they don't care what you know until they know you care. In other words, establish that relationship with them, tell them it's a two-way street. Hey, I'm learning from you and you're learning from us.

Jody Klevin: 29:16

So you know, that's my quote to establish that great culture and climate, to make them feel like they're part of the team, to let them realize that they've got information to share with us. It's a two-way street. So really, that is my advice to keep that quote in mind and show them that you care and that you're really willing to invest in them. And, Kevin, you said it earlier, it's not busy work, it's not filing papers, that kind of thing. It's really helping develop them. And it goes with that quote of you know, they've got to know you care before they, you know, are ready to listen to what you have to share as they're mentoring their coach.

Kevin Minor: 29:54

Absolutely yeah. No, that's great. Couldn't have said it better myself.

Shaquasia Barksdale: 29:58

I just want to say this has been a fantastic time with David and Judy on here. This has been a fantastic time with David and Judy on here, and the engagement piece is one of the most amazing things that I've heard thus far. As far as making sure your interns have the tools and them wanting to be present, them wanting to actually also come back and apply, and that's one of the main goals of public procurement. We want our young people to get involved, but also care and want to do the job, and both of you are on an amazing path and continue to be to do so. So thank you so much for all you do.

Kevin Minor: 30:42

Yep, and thank you so much for joining us for the interview today.